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Area Students Compete In Super Mileage Challenge

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Members of Warsaw Community High School's Super Mileage team are (L to R), front row: Gage Vervaeet, Ben Bryan, Trevor Rouch, Dylan Woodling; back row: Kyle Sexton, Karis May, Drew Dobbins, David Miller, Brandon Williams, Tanner Mills and Tyler Larrew. Not pictured are Jesse O'Hara, Kevin Rich and Adam Hunsberger. Photo by Gary Nieter, Times-Union.

The most fuel-efficient cars on the road today, hybrids, average around 40 miles per gallon.

Sunday and Monday, students from four area high schools will be traveling down to Indianapolis to see if the cars they built can get better gas mileage than other competing Indiana schools. Miles per gallon is expected to be in the hundreds or even thousands.

The 14th annual Indiana Math, Science and Technology Education Alliance Super Mileage Challenge will be held at O'Reilly Raceway Park, Indianapolis, Monday beginning at 8 a.m.

Forty Indiana high schools have entered 60 cars in the three classes of competition. The four local high school teams competing are Whitko, Triton, Wawasee and Warsaw.

Students build their own cars under the supervision of a faculty member. They are responsible for the design and construction of the car and for raising all funds needed for the project.

Stock class allows no modification to the engine and there will be 28 cars competing. Unlimited class allows engine modifications and will have 27 entries.

A new category this year is the Experimental class, which will feature cars powered by diesel fuel, batteries and hydrogen. Five cars are entered in this class.

Whitko High School transportation class teacher Jay Ocken said Whitko will be competing in the Stock class and Unlimited class races. Sunday, they will go down to the Vincennes University hangar in Indianapolis for technical and safety inspection.

Whitko students started working in November on their technical drawings and proposal packet. The proposal packet, Ocken said, has to include the technical drawings, calculation of the turning radius and drag coefficient and provide an explanation of the safety features. They had to plan how they will utilize the track, detail where the accessories on the cars will be, and detail cost estimates and funding.

Late January, Ocken said, they started the actual physical work on the cars.

For the competition this year, Ocken said, they made some modifications to their Stock car. They went to a smaller wheel, improved their brake system and made some minor modifications to the body to get it smoother.

In 2008, Whitko's Unlimited car placed 12th and got 215.60 mpg. Their Stock car previously got 222.9 mpg for ninth place.

Ocken said the goal this year is to 245 to 250 mpg.

"That is a little low," Ocken said. He said they'd like to get closer to 400 mpg.

Whitko student Bryan Slusher said they want to get the best mileage they can get. One way they plan to do that, said student Garret VanDeputte, is to use the track to their advantage.

VanDeputte also thanked their sponsors, including Johnson Sign, Whitley Welding Manufacturing, Tarkio Road and Arnold Brothers.

For Triton's Stock car, driver Dustin Kreft said they moved the wheel back. Last year, the two back wheels were more like a tricycle, and they wanted to change that. They also made the car smaller and hopefully, he said, more aerodynamic.

In 2008, they got about 136 mpg. This year, Kreft said, their goal is 300 mpg.

Triton teacher Sam Davis said the Triton Technology Club has been working on their Stock and Unlimited cars one night a week all year. Davis said the hardest part was the proposal.

"We couldn't have done any of it without the help of the Marshall County Community Foundation," said Davis.

Wawasee has made some changes to their car this year as well. Teacher Allen Coblentz said they added carbon fiber for the body and are using a vacuum infusion system to run the car. The changes will make the car stronger and lighter, Coblentz said.

Wawasee students built the fuel injection system with the assistance of Technical Services. "They've been very helpful," said Coblentz.

Jake Garner, student, said they're shooting for 1,500 mpg this year.

"That would be the most Wawasee has ever gotten," Garner said. "We can win the event if we get 1,500."

The keys, he said, are the fuel injection system and the carbon fiber body. "They're major, major improvements," he said.

Wawasee started their Unlimited car in August. With all the time and energy they put into it, Garner said there was no way they could have done two cars this year.

"It's cool to see how we can come up with ideas and put them to work, and to see if they work," Garner said.

Warsaw plans to compete with three cars this year, according to teacher Joe Bryan. The diesel car has had some engine issues, the Stock car should be ready to go by Sunday and the Unlimited is ready.

Bryan said the goal this year is to get 1,200 mpg. Last year, the Unlimited averaged 932 mpg, while the Stock averaged more than 400 mpg. The diesel is experimental this year.

A big factor in the competition this year, Bryan said, may be the wind. According to Accuweather, he said, they're predicting wind speeds of 20 mph in Indianapolis Monday, with gusts of up to 40 mph.

"That could be a major factor in mileage. It could work for you, but it also could work against you," he said.

WCHS's Advanced Transportation Class has been working on the cars all year. Mark Neukam is the teacher in charge of the class, and Bryan is serving as an adviser and consultant. Bryan's responsibility is the Unlimited car,

with Neukam overseeing the other two.

"Barring any unforeseen circumstances, we should do real well," Bryan said.

The Super Mileage Challenge is a great learning experience for the students, Bryan said. It not only teaches them skills and about deadlines, but also about working together.

"The kids have just put a lot of time into all the cars. We'll see what happens," he said.

None of it could happen without the sponsors, he said. WCHS's team has 30 sponsors, including Biomet, Crouse Body Shop, Elliot's Heating and Air Conditioning, Indiana Vac-Form, Lake City Honda, Louis Dreyfus, NAPA, Quality Glass, Silver Lake Lions Club, U.S. Army, Warsaw Engineering and Fabrication, Zimmer, Toyota Motor Sports, Layco Restorations, WCHS Student Council, Warsaw Vocational Welding, Warsaw Vocational Machine Tool, C&P Machining, DePuy, Gilsinger John Deere, Kugler Carpentry, Lewis Salvage, Medtronic, Pizza Hut, Robert Signs, Trail House, Wal-Mart, Mavron Inc., Colbin Tool Co. and Northern Indiana Paint Supply.

The Warsaw team also has a Web site created by student Trevor Rouch. The Web site is at www.bengalracingonline.com

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